

“Good Design” Draft Recommendations 2.26.08

In its 1st Report to the Governor, the Council expressed the following “Concern:”

Good, Honest Design. The Council agrees with one of the Council’s witnesses who has written elsewhere that “the basic implication of (Maine’s recent) economic growth patterns is a paradox: *to retain Maine’s special character as a place that feels closely connected with the natural environment, Maine people will have to pay much, much more attention to the built environment...* Mainers by and large are far more passionate about the natural than the built environment. A strong commitment to developing a Maine sense of design for the built environment, as architects such as John Calvin Stevens did, will make all the difference” to Maine’s future Quality of Place. It is the Council’s intention to explore with the Chancellor of the University of Maine System the possibility of creating capacity within the System to teach, research, and extend the best principles and practice of design for our landscapes and communities.

The Council has since met with Chancellor Rich Pattenau de of the University of Maine System, President John Fitzsimmons of the Maine Community College System, and Commissioner Laura Fortman of the Maine Department of Labor to discuss this issue and the related question of workforce training and development to achieve the Councils’ goals.

Recommendations: The Council recommends the following:

1. University of Maine System. The Council strongly recommends that community planning and design programs, and future development of related education, research, and outreach capacity in the UMS, be designated as “a critical discipline” within the recently adopted *UMS Agenda for Action*, and aggressively pursued as such. In this connection, the Council strongly supports enhancement of the undergraduate architectural studies program at UMA and the professional program in community planning and development at USM.

Recent research on the seven technology sectors that comprise most of the “critical disciplines” identified in the *Agenda for Action* demonstrates that maintaining a high quality of place is critical to Maine’s ability to keep and attract the workforce needed to transform the Maine economy and make the Maine R&D effort a success.

It is likewise critical because sustaining Maine’s quality of place will require the same level of careful attention, and a similar level of education, research, and outreach devoted to the built environment as is currently devoted within the UMS to the natural environment. The System is well-endowed with resources related to the natural environment, and must now grow its capacity to undertake similar levels of effort

devoted to the design and shape of landscapes, buildings, neighborhoods, and communities.

In this effort, the UMS must build on its core programs already present. These programs, together with any other appropriate elements within the UMS, should work with the Maine design community (the Maine Association of Planners, the American Institute of Architects-Maine Chapter, and representatives of other design professions such as landscape architects) to prepare a multi-year investment strategy to expand education, research, and outreach in the design professions in Maine. This plan should include not only undergraduate and professional degrees, but other educational programs directed toward citizens and public officials involved in planning and design issues, such as the graduate certificate program in planning currently offered by USM.

2. Maine Community College System. The Council strongly recommends that the MCCS move aggressively to seize upon Maine's well-established reputation and competitive advantage in historic preservation building techniques, and incorporate training in this growing field within its existing degree offerings and programs.

A number of campuses of the Maine Community College System have excellent programs in construction technology and building techniques. Teaching construction techniques for the preservation of historic buildings would expand the pool of skilled workers needed for this work. Builders who are themselves masters of historic building techniques could be recruited as faculty or part-time lecturers, or could be asked to be sponsor apprentices from the community colleges to gain both credit and experience in historical building techniques.

The MCCS has identified a priority of enhancing the skills in rural areas in order to increase development and incomes. Historic preservation is particularly important in rural and small town Maine, where change has been slowest, and so this initiative will fit well with the MCCS' emphasis on extending its programs in ways that address the needs of rural Maine, while at the same time addressing important needs in the faster growing urban areas.

3. Local Planning Boards. The Council strongly recommend that Greater Portland Landmarks, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, and Maine Preservation collaborate to create a training program for local planning board members that will focus on historic downtowns and illustrate how local decisions regarding zoning, roads, parking, and the scale and scope of buildings affects the quality and livability of the built environment. This program could perhaps be offered as part of the planning board training course now offered by the Maine Municipal Association.